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Citation for published version:

Bond, HK 2012, 'Josephus on Herod's Domestic Intrigue in the Jewish War' Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol 43, no. 3, pp. 295-314. DOI: 10.1163/157006312X644128

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1163/157006312X644128](https://doi.org/10.1163/157006312X644128)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal for the Study of Judaism

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Helen Bond, 2012. Bond, H. K. (2012). 'Josephus on Herod's Domestic Intrigue in the Jewish War'. Journal for the Study of Judaism, 43(3), 295-314doi: 10.1163/157006312X644128

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Josephus on Herod's Domestic Intrigue in the Jewish War

Abstract

This article argues that women and domestic intrigue are prominent within the Herod narrative in Josephus' *Jewish War* for a specific rhetorical reason. While the first half of the narrative presents the famous king in encomiastic terms, using him to illustrate Josephus' contention that Jews generally were content to remain loyal to Rome, the second half of the account subtly presents a rather different thesis. Attention to domestic drama allowed Josephus to suggest that Herod was a man who was unable to control either his own emotions or his turbulent family, and so was unfit to rule. Ultimately for Josephus, the ideal constituency for Judaea is not monarchy (as represented by Herod) but the theocratic reign of priests.

Keywords

Herod, Josephus, *Jewish War*, women, rhetorical motifs, literary tropes.

The present essay began as an historical investigation of Herod's harem. Despite N. Kokkinos' exhaustive study of court life and the individual wives of Herod I, I thought there might still be scope for a study which explored the situation of these women who found themselves between the competing expectations of a Hellenistic monarchy and their friends and confidantes at the Roman imperial court.¹ I began by

¹ N. Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). See also S. Rocca, *Herod's Judaea: A Mediterranean State in the Classical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), esp. 65-127.

I am grateful to Profs Sean Freyne, William Horbury and Jan Willem van Henten who invited me to present an earlier version of this paper at a seminar on new approaches to Josephus at the Berlin

analysing the earlier account of Herodian domestic life in the *Jewish War*, where Josephus had rather helpfully gathered together the material in the final part of the account (1.431-673). Quickly, however, it became apparent that extracting historical material from this narrative was not going to be easy as the women exhibited few particular or individual characteristics. Even specific events, such as Salome's alleged rape of her nephew (1.498), seemed strangely dislocated from reality, and the narrative was peppered with vague references to 'gangs of women' at court. Rather late in the day, I have to admit, the reason for this dawned on me: the stories of court intrigue are not there for what they tell us about the *women*, but about *Herod*. In the remainder of this essay, I shall explain this a little more.

It is widely assumed, in at least some significant branches of Josephan scholarship, that while Josephus clearly drew on various sources (Nicolaus of Damascus, for example, *Ant.* 14.8-9, 16.183-186), he was a skilful writer who tailored the material so that it cohered with his overarching dramatic, political and theological aims.² We therefore need to read each account of Herod as a coherent piece which fits not only

meeting of SNTS in 2010. Thanks are also due to Joseph Sievers, my respondent, for many helpful observations and critiques.

² See in particular the pioneering studies by R. Laqueur, *Der Jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: ein biographischer Versuch auf neuer quellenkritischer Grundlage* (Giessen: Munchow'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1920); H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (diss.; University of Chicago, 1957); and numerous studies by L. H. Feldman, many of which are collected in his *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) and *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). More recently, see P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: his Life, his Works and their Importance* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1998) and S. Mason, ed., *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

its immediate context but also the rhetorical functions of the work as a whole.

Needless to say, the Herod narratives in the *War* have already come under scrutiny,³ but two areas which seem to have been overlooked are first their odd structure and secondly the account of Herod's domestic life. It is these particular aspects which I wish to address.

The Herod narrative takes up a large portion of the *War* (almost three quarters of one book out of seven) – a surprising fact given that Herod's reign predates the main interest of the work and Josephus states quite explicitly in his prologue that he intends to be brief in his account of events preceding his birth (1.18). There are, I suggest, three main reasons for this interest in Herod. First, quite simply, Herod was the most famous Jew of the first century. His descendants were well-known in the Flavian Court; Agrippa II had lent support to Rome in the recent war; and his sister Berenice had been Titus' mistress since around 67 (and was presumably still causing something of a stir). Readers of the *War* would doubtless want to know about this famous Jewish

³ See S. Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (2d ed.; Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003), 152-164; J. W. van Henten, "Matthew 2.16 and Josephus' Portrayals of Herod," in *Jesus, Paul and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge* (ed. R. Buitenwerf, H. W. Hollander and J. Tromp; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 101-21; and Tamar Landau, *Out-Heroding Herod: Josephus, Rhetoric and the Herod-Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), abridged as "Power and Pity: the Image of Herod in Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*," in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (ed. J. Sievers and G. Lembi; Boston: Brill, 2005), 159-81. Recent treatments of Herod, such as P. Richardson's *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) and A. Kashner (with Eliezer Witztum), *King Herod: A Persecuted Persecutor: A Case Study in Psychohistory and Psychobiography* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007) have not tended to analyse Josephus' narratives individually to any great extent.

king. Second, Herod's reign probably was, in many respects, an important prelude to the war, contributing as it did to the emergence of internal tensions, factions and dissent. Some of the main themes of his reign, including the siege of Jerusalem, prefigure what will come later. Third, and probably most importantly for the present paper, Herod's reign, with its accommodation to Roman rule, was the perfect vehicle for demonstrating Judaeans loyalty to Rome. No one more than Herod could epitomise Josephus' contention that Jews generally were content to live under the umbrella of imperial rule.⁴

The lengthy narrative is divided into two clearly defined 'Acts': the first describes Herod's rise to kingship, consolidation and glory (*War* 1.180-430); and the second his domestic upheaval and decline (*War* 1.431-673). This is highly artificial, and gives the impression of a good reign which went into severe decline towards the end. A quick look at chronology, however, shows that the second act contains material which belongs to a much earlier period (in the *Antiquities* its much more integrated, as it presumably was in Nicolaus).⁵ Josephus, then, has deliberately structured his material

⁴ This emerges particularly in the preface and the three long speeches (that of Agrippa II, 2.345-404, Josephus, 5.362-419, and Eleazar, 7.325-388). Josephus shows that Jews were generally accepting of Roman rule (2.73, 91); Rome ruled through God's good favour (2.352) and those who rebelled were innovators (2.118, 414). See S. Mason, "Josephus, Daniel and the Flavian House," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 161-91.

⁵ S. J. D. Cohen has compared the structure in the *War* to that of the *Ant.*, though he advances no reasons for this particular arrangement, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 53-58. T. Ilan suggests that the structure in *War* mirrors the story of David in 1 Sam 16 and 1 Kgs 2, arguing that Nicolaus of Damascus' "official" history of Herod's reign presented the king as a second David in order to gain popular support, "King David, King Herod and

in this manner. The question is: why? What effect is he trying to create in the narrative? To answer this, we need to look at the two Acts in turn.

Act I (*War* 1.180-430)

In this first act, Herod is described in encomiastic terms thoroughly familiar to his Graeco-Roman readers.⁶ He is of good birth and fine parentage (1.194, 282-4),⁷ the son of an impressive father (1.181, 187-203). A precocious lad, he quickly demonstrates his resourcefulness and energy (1.203-4, 205), and comes to the

Nicolaus of Damascus,” *JSQ* 5 (1998): 195-240. While this might fit with Herod’s own self-perception (see Rocca, *Herod’s Judaea*, 22-29), it would assume Nicolaus wrote for people familiar with the biblical account. I find quite persuasive M. Toher’s suggestion that Nicolaus’ *Universal History* contained no more than an account of Herod’s rise to kingship, and that Josephus found most of the Herod material in Nicolaus’ *Autobiography*, written in Rome after Herod’s death. Although this account would have praised Herod, Nicolaus’ main purpose was to defend himself; his intended reader was not so much Herod as perhaps Augustus who would have taken a lively interest in a succession story. In this case, while Nicolaus may have broadly structured his account in terms of the glory of Herod’s kingdom followed by his private difficulties, a connection with the biblical portrayal of David becomes less likely. See M. Toher, “Herod, Augustus, and Nicolaus of Damascus” in *Herod and Augustus: Papers held at the IJS Conference, 21st –23rd June 2005* (ed. D. M. Jacobson and N. Kokkinos; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 65-81.

⁶ On the ancient encomium see J. H. Neyrey, “Josephus’ Vita and the Encomium: A Native Model of Personality,” *JSJ* 25 (1994): 177-206. *Tyrannos*, though frequent in the *Antiquities*, occurs only once in the *War*, and then it is quickly dismissed by Nicolaus (2.92).

⁷ It is true that the father of the seven sons in the Caves of Arbela chides Herod as a “low-born upstart” (*tapeinos*, 1.313), though as the Loeb notes suggest, this might be better rendered “for his abject spirit.” The same word is used again in 1.478 when Aristobulus upbraids Salome’s daughter for her low origin, though there the contrast is clearly with the Hasmonaean’s *royal* birth (Salome herself, like Herod, was clearly of aristocratic lineage).

attention of leading Romans who make him king in recognition of his “heroic qualities” (*aretē*) and enterprising character (*drastērios*) (282-283).

Herod’s courage is particularly stressed (1.238; 321, 303), his tactical abilities (1.309-113, 1.373-379) and victories (1.240, 253, 264, 304-308, 322, 334-339 etc), his mercy and desire to avoid excessive devastation (1.295, 311-13, 320, 352, 354) and popularity (1.241, 291, 293, 313, 335); even Hyrcanus II, though deeply envious of Herod, is still said to have loved him (1.208-211). In matters of piety, too, the Herod of the *War* excels. He offers sacrifice both to his own God (380) and to those of Rome (285). He learns of his brother’s death through a dream (1.328) and has a couple of miraculous escapes which earn for him the reputation of being a special favourite of heaven (*theofilēs*, 1.331-332, 140-141). He is a great benefactor (1.401, 400-407, 422-428) and shows his piety in the care of his family (1.264, 267, 292, 294, 303; 1.275; 1.417). Most importantly, of course, Josephus underlines Herod’s utter loyalty to Rome. Although he changed his patron regularly, there was never any fluctuation in his allegiance to the Italian superpower. His support for Antony at the battle of Actium did not in any way jeopardise his position, as Augustus, Josephus claims, “considered his victory incomplete so long as Herod remained Antony’s ally” (1.386), and was anxious to have him on his side. The king was lavished with all kinds of attentions, but “What Herod valued more than all these privileges” Josephus claims (in an exaggerated outburst!) “was that in Caesar’s affection he stood next after Agrippa [M. Vipsanius Agrippa], in Agrippa’s next after Caesar. Herod’s kingdom had now reached its fullest extent, thanks to Roman benefactions and his own unwavering loyalty” (1.400).

There are seeds here and there in this first act of what will come later: the presence of enemies, the destructive power of court gossip,⁸ and clear indications that Herod has an angry streak (we hear of his fury, *orgē*, 1.214, 252 and his wrath, *thumos*, 1.230), but in this first act his emotions are held in check, only venting themselves in righteous anger against those who have murdered his family (1.227, 228, 272, 336, 342). Overall, the picture of Herod in this first half of the narrative, encapsulated in the eulogy of 1.429-430, is overwhelmingly positive.⁹ Herod is a great general, anticipating the prowess of Vespasian and Titus (and even Josephus himself),¹⁰ showing that in this first act he is one of the great heroes of the *War*. This fact is reinforced by numerous anti-heroes—Hyrchanus, Malichus the Arab, Antigonus and the Parthians, and even a number of Roman commanders—whose unflattering depictions emphasise Herod’s laudable qualities all the more.¹¹

Yet despite (or perhaps because of) all this adulation, Herod never becomes a real character in the *War*. In common with other historians of his day, Josephus has little interest in depicting psychologically believable human beings; instead, his characters

⁸ *War* 1.208-09, 212, 215, 276; though here it is at the court of Hyrcanus II or the Arabs.

⁹ For a discussion of this eulogy and its reinterpretation in the *Ant.*, see J. Sievers, “Herod, Josephus and Laqueur: A Reconsideration” in *Herod and Augustus* (ed. D. Jacobson and N. Kokkinos), 83-112.

¹⁰ On the depiction of Titus and Vespasian in the *War*, see M. Stern, “Josephus and the Roman Empire as Reflected in the *Jewish War*” in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 71-80, esp. 72-74.

¹¹ On Hyrcanus, see D. R. Schwartz, “Josephus on Hyrcanus II” in *Josephus* (ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers), 210-32. On Malichus: see 1.223-26, 230 ; on Antigonus and the Parthians: see 1.257, 268, 273-74, 322, 326, 357; on Roman commanders: see Ventidius (1.288-89), Silo (1.291, 298), Roman troops in Jerusalem (1.354-57).

are staged figures whose roles are determined by the internal logic of his text, and who tend to illustrate general truths or “types.”¹² As Tamar Landau notes, he is symbolic, “a metaphor and exemplum of fundamental themes and issues that recur in Josephus’ writing.”¹³ Josephus has succeeded in showing the great Jewish king as the model of loyalty to Rome, an aristocrat content to rule within the umbrella of the Roman Empire. He demonstrates a fundamental desire of Jews to live in peace and harmony with the ruling power. Had Josephus chosen to finish his account here (and neglected to write the highly critical account in the *Antiquities*), posterity might have had a rather more positive picture of the king. But he chose to add a second act, an act which, I suggest, subtly undercuts the character of the king. It is to this second act that I wish now to turn.

Act 2: Domestic Tragedy (War 1.431-673)

It is well known that Josephus tells the story of Herod’s domestic troubles in the manner of a Greek drama.¹⁴ But why does he devote so much attention to Herod’s domestic problems in a work describing civil unrest and revolt? And why narrate it in this way? The king’s succession crisis (a superabundance of sons, rather than a lack of heirs as was his patron, Augustus’, problem) clearly led to far-reaching changes in Judaea, and had to be told; but why give so much detail? Why include all the dirty linen? And why so many women?

¹² See the discussion on characterization in Aristotle, *Poetics* 6.19-24 and *Ad Herennium* 4.49.63-4.53.66. See also the various authors in C. Pelling, ed. *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). The “psychologizing” of the *Antiquities* marks a distinct change from the *War*; see the several detailed studies in L. H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus’ Rewritten Bible*.

¹³ T. Landau, *Out-Heroding Herod*, 29.

¹⁴ H. StJ. Thackeray, *Jewish War* LCL I-II, xvi-xvii who cites Eusebius, *H.E.* 1.8.

Court tales were of course a commonplace in certain historiographical traditions, from Herodotus onwards. The lives of Persian or Macedonian rulers and their harems were clearly of interest to readers; even the Jewish scriptures abound with court tales from a variety of settings (we might think of the courts of David or Solomon, or those of Nebuchadnezzar or Ahasuerus-Xerxes I). Court historians, such as Nicolaus of Damascus, had become prominent during this period, and clearly found an outlet for their work. Indeed, Tal Ilan suggests that Josephus simply reproduced Nicolaus' colourful and racy narrative here, a narrative which may well have blamed Herod's womenfolk for the disintegration of the royal house, in an attempt to add drama and entertainment to his narrative.¹⁵

I do not doubt that Josephus found his material in Nicolaus, I am even quite convinced that Nicolaus described the women in a similar vein to what we have in Josephus; he was interested in the psychological effects of passion on his characters, dramatic episodes and the man of action attacked by the clever machinations of others.¹⁶ Elsewhere in the *War*, however, Josephus does not show a great interest in

¹⁵ T. Ilan, "'Things Unbecoming a Woman' (*Ant.* 13.431) Josephus and Nicolaus on Women" in *Integrating Women into Second Temple Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 85-125. Ilan's method is to compare Josephus' attitude to women in passages where he was not dependent on a particular source (eg his activities in Galilee), with passages where he was clearly dependent on Nicolaus (eg the Hasmonaean and Herodian sections). She notes that Josephus himself has little interest in women, and that the colourful, manipulative and predatory women at court are lifted straight from Nicolaus' account. As will become clear in the above discussion, Josephus has his own agenda and his own creative way of working with these women, even if the material itself came largely from Nicolaus.

¹⁶ See H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements*, 13-34; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-84. 3 vols.), 1:227-60; B. Z.

women and domestic affairs. The central themes of wars and politics (as with his Thucydidean model) did not in general lend themselves to discussions of women's activity. Now and then he allows himself the kind of misogynistic comments that were typical of the time,¹⁷ and frequently includes brief references to women to add pathos to the drama.¹⁸ Salome Alexandra, though a good queen, is said to be frail, superstitious and under the thumb of the Pharisees (1.107-19); and he clearly disliked Cleopatra, going beyond even Roman sources in his condemnation of the queen.¹⁹ But generally speaking, Josephus has little interest in women or the private lives of his menfolk. The detour here, I suggest, is not simply because he has access to good material.

A more fruitful line of enquiry comes from an analysis of Roman rhetorical motifs and literary tropes connected with women. Josephus shows his familiarity with these in the *Antiquities*: his recasting of the matriarchs into ideal Roman *matronae* is well known, a presentation which lends nobility not only to the patriarchs, but to the whole

Wacholder, "Josephus and Nicolaus of Damascus" in *Josephus, the Bible and History* (ed. L. Feldman and G. Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 154-79.

¹⁷ See the detailed study by B. Mayer-Schärtl, *Des Frauenbild des Josephus: Eine sozialgeschichtliche und kulturanthropologische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995). Also, P. W. van der Horst, "Einige Beobachtungen zum Thema Frauen im antiken Judentum," *BThZ* 10 (1993): 77-93.

¹⁸ E.g. 1.301, 2.192, 237, 307, 339, 395, 400, 3.112, 201, 246, 248, 262-3, 304, 4.106-11, 260, 460, 561, 5.418, 419, 5.513, 544-45, 7.208, 228, 324, 321-27, 389-95; perhaps the most horrific of these is the action to which Mary was driven during the siege of Jerusalem, 6.199-13.

¹⁹ See J. W. van Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus: From Herod's Rival to the Wise Ruler's Opposite," in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* (ed. A. Hilhorst and G. H. van Kooten; Brill: Leiden, 2005), 113-32.

Jewish race.²⁰ Later on, as Shelly Matthews has shown, Josephus shows his awareness of a range of tropes and rhetorical devices. The connection between women and “bad religion” is exploited in the story of the expulsion of Isis worshippers from Rome in *Ant.* 18, a narrative which is full of common Roman stereotypes²¹; and Gentile noblewomen frequently act as advocates and benefactors of Jews and the Jewish religion.²² But there is a fine line between a woman’s wise counsel and her assumption of too much influence over her husband. The fall of the Hasmonaeans is attributed to Salome Alexandra who is condemned for her “desire for things unbecoming a woman” (13.431), that is, for political power.²³ And Herod Antipas is ridiculed and emasculated for listening to a “woman’s frivolous chatter” (18.255). Josephus, then, shows himself fully at home with Roman discourse

²⁰ J. L. Bailey, “Josephus’ Portrayal of the Matriarchs” in *Josephus, the Bible and Christianity* (ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata), 154-79; B. H. Amaru, “Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus’ Antiquities,” *JJS* 39 (1988): 143-70; E. Schuller, “Women of the Exodus in Biblical Retellings of the Second Temple Period,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis, Fortress, 1989), 178-94.

²¹ The Isis worshippers were involved in a crime of passion (reminiscent of the outrages associated with the Bacchanalia in the second century BCE), their open association of religious and sexual misconduct were clearly twin perils to the Roman state. Jews, however, whom Josephus concedes were also expelled at the same time, were not tarred with promiscuity and passion, but let down by a few degenerate outcasts intent rather on swindling. Thus Josephus subtly suggests that Isis worshippers got what they deserved, while Jews were rather hard done by. See S. Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetorical of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford University Press 2001), 25. See also H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements*, 54-68.

²² S. Matthews, “Ladies Aid: Gentile Noblewomen as Saviors and Benefactors in the Antiquities,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 199-218.

²³ See J. Sievers, “The Role of Women in the Hasmonaeon Dynasty” in *Josephus, the Bible and History* (ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata), 132-46.

concerning women in the *Antiquities*. Examples in the *War* are fewer (perhaps given its theme), but do exist: the Antony and Cleopatra narratives show knowledge of common stereotypes (1.243, 359-391, 7.300-302; see below); Claudius yielded to the artifices of his wife Agrippina (2.248-249); Josephus knows a mother's courage reflects well on her son (1.57-60; see also the reference to Sarah, the mother of the race, 5.379-381) and that an effective way to insult one's enemies is to accuse them of dressing (and behaving) like women (4.560-565). It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that where women and domestic matters come to the fore in the earlier narrative we are similarly dealing with rhetorical motifs and literary *topoi*.²⁴ With this in mind, then, we shall turn back to Act II of the Herod narrative.

Although Herod is the central character in both Acts, there is a striking shift between them. In the first he is active, full of energy, taking charge. In the second, he is passive, reacting to the actions of others, lashing out. No longer is he manly and controlled, but frenzied and lacking in sagacity (1.452). Everything he has worked to achieve in the first Act comes crashing down in the second, in a desperate hunt for a successor as his household disintegrates around him. The domestic stories are extremely complex, but I would like to look at them under two headings: (1) first, what I have called the *Mariamne cycle*, these concern Herod's relationship with his favourite wife, the Hasmonaean princess. (2) And the second is what I have termed the *Antipater-cycle*. This group of stories centres on Antipater's successful scheme to eliminate his rivals and the retribution which falls on his head. Included here are a

²⁴ T. Landau notes the presence of a number of Graeco-Roman rhetorical conventions in the *War*, *Out-Heroding Herod*, 69-113. The reading presented here was briefly raised (but not at all developed) in H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements*, 116-17.

number of minor villains, including disparate groups of court women and Herod's scheming sister, Salome.

(1) Mariamne cycle

Right from the start of this second act, Herod, we learn, has a fatal flaw: his passion for his wife Mariamne (*erōs*). She brought discord (*stasis*) to his house (432), but Herod was oblivious of her hatred until his mother and sister wrongly accused her of adultery. The charges struck Herod like a thunderbolt. "His love," we are told, "intensified his jealousy; he reflected on Cleopatra's craft . . . and was menaced, he reckoned, with the loss not merely of his consort but of his life" (438). Needing to visit Mark Antony on matters of state, Herod put Mariamne under the care of Salome's husband, Joseph, with orders to kill her if Antony killed him. But Joseph betrayed the king's orders to Mariamne, and when she divulged this on his return, Herod was livid, "frenzied with passion" (*enethousia tō pathei*, 443) and assumed that Joseph had seduced her. Urged along by Salome and "mad with sheer jealousy" (*akratou zēloturias ekmaneis*), Herod ordered both instantly executed. No sooner was the deed done, however, than he was overcome with bitter remorse (441).

There are a number of interesting things in this narrative. First, the characterization of Mariamne. In the first Act, she was described briefly as "the most astute of women" (*sunetōtatē gunaikōn*, 1.262). Now, in this second act, Josephus does acknowledge that she has her flaws (a certain arrogance perhaps), but overall the portrait of Mariamne is noticeably under-developed.²⁵ In the *Antiquities* she is charged with attempting to poison the king (*Ant.* 15.222-230; historically I suspect that treason was

²⁵ Compare the much fuller portrait of the Hasmonaean princess in *Ant.* 15.218-19, 236-39.

the reason why she was eliminated: Mariamne was descended from a Hellenistic dynasty in which women could occupy the throne, and doubtless she thought she might make a bid²⁶), but here her story is set in the much more womanly context of consuming passion, love and jealousy.²⁷ The important point is that Mariamne is not the focus of the story; Josephus' interest lies not so much in her provocations as Herod's response. Set in the context of Herod's visit to Antony, the scene immediately connects the two men, heightened by the reference to Cleopatra (interestingly, in the *Antiquities*, these events occur on a visit to *Caesar*²⁸). Three times in Act 1, Josephus stressed Antony's slavery to his passion for Cleopatra (*tō Kleopatras erōti dedoulōmonon*, 1.243, 359, 389-90). Both men are enfeebled by

²⁶ See A. Schalit, *König Herodes: der Mann und Sein Werk* (2d ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 133-35; E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: from Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 71; T. Ilan, "“Things Unbecoming a Woman,”" 114-15. Josephus suggests that the love-potion/poison story was fabricated by Salome (who is presented in even more villainous terms in this later work); it is likely, however, that some element of truth underlies the general charge of treason. A number of references in the *Ant.* suggest that Mariamne's mother Alexandra (who makes no appearance in the *War*) attempted to reassert Hasmonaean rule: *Ant.* 15.166, 183, 206.

²⁷ Josephus' own Hasmonaean connections may have played some part here too (*Life* 1-8), as perhaps did his association with a number of Herodians (Agrippa II, for example, who was a direct descendant of Mariamne).

²⁸ The complex question of whether Herod left Mariamne under guard once (so *War*) or twice (so *Ant.*) is beyond the scope of this essay. It is interesting to note, however, that if Josephus were choosing only one version of the story to retell, the connections with Antony might commend this particular version. For discussion, see E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (rev. and ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 1:302-303, n.49; H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements*, 83-123.

women, cast under their spell and at the mercy of their own excessive passions.

Ironically Herod could see it in his friend (1.389-390), but not in himself.

Strikingly unlike the Herod of Act I, the Herod of Act II is a man who cannot control his emotions. He is completely lacking in that most central virtue *sōphrosunē*, self-control, modesty. His sexual desires and jealousy have completely engulfed him, mastered him and rendered him weak, intemperate, self-destructive and, ultimately, unmanly. This would be bad enough in a man of no standing, but in a man of status such a complete lack of control assumes far greater proportions. A lack of self-restraint was a clear sign to a Roman that a leader lacked moral authority, an assumption skilfully employed by a number of Roman writers.²⁹ As Kate Cooper notes,

“what is really at stake is not desire per se but masculine character and reliability . . . when women and their influence are discussed, their appearance should be read

²⁹ See E. R. Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928), 55-102; also K. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. 1-19, who notes that Plutarch in particular skilfully dropped in accusations that a man’s marital life lacked concord whenever it suited his purposes (contrast his accounts of Pompey, where he deflected charges of sexual excess, with Antony, whom he accuses of dissolution brought on by unchecked lust and a woman’s charm). See also W. V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), esp. 229-63 and S. Matthews, *First Converts*, 7. On the loss of masculinity here, see S. D. Moore and J. C. Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities* (Atlanta : SBL, 2003), 121. Similar sentiments are expressed in a Jewish context, see 1 Macc 1:30-31 and Prov 16:32.

as a sign that a man's character is in question, whether its virtue is to be defended or its dissolution illustrated.”³⁰

Herod has been mastered by his passions, something over which he should have had control, and in so doing has squandered his good name. But Josephus has not finished with him yet – he will draw on other Roman stereotypes and assumptions in the next, lengthier group of stories.

(2) Antipater cycle

As his relationship with Mariamne's sons deteriorated, Herod recalled to court his eldest son, Antipater. Intent on securing the throne for himself, the villainous Antipater slandered his rivals until Herod was forced to take his family disputes to Caesar who, we are told, “re-established his disordered household” (*ton oikon autou tetaragmenon*, 457). Returning to Jerusalem, Herod made a long (and deeply ironic) speech to the assembled crowd: he stressed his kingly office, the need for concord in his house, and showed himself fully aware of the destructive nature of “factions and rivalries” (458-465). Yet the whole episode had no effect whatsoever on the brothers, who carried discord (*stasis*) in their hearts, and parted more suspicious of one another than ever (467).

Antipater, now all powerful, continued to plot until Herod's house was in complete disarray. Everyone pointed the finger at someone else: informers accused Herod's brother Pheroras of trying to poison the King; Herod's sister Salome is accused both of plotting to marry his enemy Syllaeus, viceroy of the King of Arabia, and of trying to rape her nephew (498; Salome's relationships are an ongoing element of the

³⁰ K. Cooper, *Virgin and the Bride*, 11.

narrative; clearly, as with any good villainess, her sexual passions cannot be contained)³¹; and Mariamne's son Alexander is accused of plotting against Herod. "The palace was given over to frightful anarchy," Josephus notes, "everyone, to gratify some personal enmity or hatred, invented calumnies; many turned to base account against their adversaries the murderous mood of wrathful royalty" (493). Herod was embittered, treated even his friends with harshness, and is said to have been reduced to such a state of alarm that he imagined he saw Alexander coming upon him with a sword. Finally, following Antipater's renewed plots and Salome's constant accusations, and despite Caesar's attempts to make Herod see reason, the sons of Mariamne were strangled at Sebaste (551). Antipater's succession was now secure, but still he could not cease from intrigue and intimidation (aided in this by Herod's brother Pheroras and a gang of unruly court women, who created new disturbances (567) and "displayed constant effrontery in the palace"). At last, retribution descended on Antipater who was arrested, accused of "infecting the whole palace with pollution" (638), and executed only days before Herod himself expired.

The dominant features here are a house in disarray, sons at war with one another, women as an uncontrollable source of disruption, a rottenness in the heart of the realm, and a father figure who is strangely absent, strangely passive in what happens. We hear of his strong emotions: his sense of being drugged (448), his "ungovernable fury" (*orgē*, 526) and his cruelty (543); he is described in direct speech by his opponents as a "ferocious -" (586) or a "blood-thirsty beast" (589). He reacts, nearly

³¹ T. Ilan suggests that Nicolaus had a particular dislike for Salome after their personal feud following Herod's death (Salome backed Antipas as successor – perhaps wisely as it turned out – while Nicolaus supported Archelaus); "Things Unbecoming a Woman," 122-25.

always violently, but seems to have no control at all (either over his wild emotions, or over his dissolute family). Once again this plays into Graeco-Roman tropes and rhetoric. Romans saw domestic harmony as a symbol of social unity, one that was important in maintaining the vigour and political harmony of the Empire itself.³² A man's fitness for public office was in part determined by how well he was seen to keep his household, his *domus*, in check. Unlike Augustus (and the King of Cappadocia who was able to quell the troubled household for a time), Herod is a man who cannot keep order amongst his children, his wives, or within his household, and as such his credentials for leadership are seriously undermined.

Another interesting aspect of these stories is the fact that Josephus highlights Herod's polygamy. He mentions elsewhere that polygamy was permissible within his culture, though he does not dwell on it (*Ant.* 17.14; see also *Ant.* 12.186-189 and 17.18, 92).³³

³² See K. Cooper, *Virgin and the Bride*, 1-19; S. Matthews, *First Converts*, 47; S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 39, 154, 182-6; S. R. Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus' Messalina," *Signs* 21 (1995): 50-82; S. Fischler, "Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: The Case of the Imperial Women at Rome" in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* (eds. L. J. Archer, S. Fischler and M. Wyke; New York: Routledge, 1994), 115-33; R. Fenn, too, notes that Josephus preyed on contemporary fears of women by portraying them as "an uncontrollable source of disruption in the lineage," *The Death of Herod: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 37. Christian writers were also concerned that their household appeared harmonious to the outside world, see the instructions in 1 Tim 3:2-5 and Tit 1:6.

³³ On polygamy, see T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 85-88. The fact that Babatha's (second) husband was still married to his first wife shows that polygamy was not confined to the elite; see N. Lewis, *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of the Letters II: Greek Papyri* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989). The practice of

When he talks about his own four relationships, he gives the impression that his wives were in series, though in fact two at least may have been simultaneous.³⁴ Clearly he feels some embarrassment in a Roman context of admitting to polygamy. In the case of Herod, though, Josephus dwells on the multitude of wives. He states that the king's "wives were numerous, since polygamy was permitted by Jewish custom and the king gladly availed himself of the privilege" (477).³⁵ This gives the impression of an unbounded sexuality to Herod, but the picture is misleading. It is only because all the domestic material from 43 years is put together that he seems constantly to be adding new wives. In fact, the change from Antipater's mother Doris (a commoner) whom he divorced in favour of Mariamne (a royal princess) made perfect political sense, and as Nikos Kokkinos' study of the Herodian dynasty has shown, it was only towards the end that Herod had as many as nine wives concurrently. His practice was to take them on in batches of three, roughly at intervals of a decade or so.³⁶ Certainly this would have raised some eyebrows in Rome, but it is only at this late period that Herod might be described as driven by lust. Josephus, though, clearly wants to give this impression

Levirate marriage also contributed to second wives (Deut 25:5-10). The constraints for most would have been economic rather than ethical.

³⁴ For Josephus' four wives, see *War* 5.419, *Life* 414, 415, 426-27. Elite Roman marriages often ended in divorce, so there was nothing particularly scandalous about a series of wives. See K. R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 129.

³⁵ Rather oddly in view of this passage, S. Rocca argues that Herod divorced each wife before taking a new one. "A hypothetical Herodian harem would not only have been unique, but would have made a terrible impression on his subjects," he writes (*Herod's Judaea*, 77).

³⁶ For tables, see N. Kokkinos, *Herodian Dynasty*, 208, 244-45; for discussion of the marriages (with dates), see 206-8.

much earlier than it is really warranted. Again, it adds to the sense of a man out of control.

Altogether, then, Act II shows a man enslaved to his passions, enfeebled by his desire for women, and completely unable to govern his household. The final evaluation of Herod contains nothing of the earlier glowing eulogy: “In his life as a whole he was blessed, if ever man was by fortune: a commoner, he mounted to the throne, retained it for all those years and bequeathed it to his own children; in his family life, on the contrary, no man was more unfortunate” (*en de tois kat’oikon atychestatos*, 665). In this strikingly short conclusion for a man who has occupied such a large section of the narrative, Josephus makes it clear that despite Herod’s outward appearance of good fortune his domestic life was a disaster. In a commoner, this might evoke a certain amount of sympathy; in a king, however, it can only underline his unfitness to reign. There can be no doubt that for Josephus Herod – despite his earlier positive qualities – is a man absolutely unfit for kingship.

What, then, is at stake in the Herod narratives in the *War*? Why does Josephus devote such a great deal of space to the monarch? And how do the two acts work together? What I suggest lies at the heart of this are Josephus’ views on *the government of his own nation*. In order to analyse this, we need to turn to the question of monarchy more widely, both in the Jewish Scriptures and in Josephus’ writings as a whole.

Monarchy and the Government of Judaea

The Jewish Scriptures, which are retold at length in the first half of the *Antiquities* and which so thoroughly shaped our author’s worldview, exhibit an ambivalent attitude

towards kingship.³⁷ Josephus knew Deut 17:14-20, a text which permitted the people to choose a fellow-Israelite as their king, but which drastically limited that king's power (particularly in comparison with the kings of surrounding territories) by bringing him firmly under the Mosaic Law. Indeed, throughout the whole "constitutional" section of Deut 16:18-18.22, the king's role is less substantial than that of priests, prophets, or even the assembly of Israel.³⁸ God's covenant is with the people, the king's role – even when acquiring cultic or even mythic levels in later texts³⁹ – is never essential. The duty of the king was to keep the Law and to encourage his subjects to do the same. As L. L. Grabbe notes, the king would be judged not so much by his military or political success, but on his obedience to the Torah.⁴⁰ In Josephus' retelling of this section, the power of the king is diminished even further by obliging him to consult with the high priest and the *gerousia* (*Ant.* 4.224).

Nowhere are the tensions associated with kingship clearer than in the inauguration of the monarchy in 1 Sam 7-15. The book of Judges had highlighted the lawlessness of the land, and the continuing refrain – "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25) - makes the request of the people entirely reasonable. Samuel realises, however, that a king "like all the

³⁷ Useful discussions of Israelite kingship include M. Brettler, 'King, Kingship' in *NIDB* 3:505-12; B. Halpern, "The Uneasy Compromise: Israel between League and Monarchy" in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (eds. B. Halpern and J. D. Levenson; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 59-96; R. Gordon, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 297-98; L. L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1995), 20-40; and the collection of essays in J. Day, ed., *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: SAP, 1998), JSOTSS 270.

³⁸ So J. G. McConville, "King and Messiah in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History" in *King and Messiah* (ed. J. Day), 277-78.

³⁹ D. Rooke emphasises the "sacral" nature of Israelite kingship, highlighting occasions when the king undertook cultic duties (eg 2 Sam 6, 1 Kgs 8, 12, 2 Kgs 16, Ps 110), "Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy" in *King and Messiah* (ed. J. Day), 187-208.

⁴⁰ L. L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners and Sages*, 28.

nations” could be interpreted as a rejection of God, and warns the assembly of the people of the consequences of a warlike, avaricious and tyrannical king (1 Sam 8:6b-22). Undeterred, the people persist in their demand until God chooses Saul, who is anointed and finally acclaimed at Mizpah (1 Sam 10). Modern scholars detect the interweaving of at least two literary traditions in this section of 1 Samuel⁴¹; Josephus, though, characteristically smoothes out inconsistencies in his material and produces a coherent and dramatic account.⁴² His Samuel grieves at the people’s request for a king, is firmly opposed to monarchy (a sentiment shared, at least in principle, by his Roman readers⁴³), and prophesies at considerable length the troubles that the Israelites will suffer when their wish is granted (*Ant.* 6.61).⁴⁴

The Jewish Scriptures present a variety of kings. While Saul receives mixed reviews, David is idealised as a “man after God’s own heart” (2 Sam 13:14, 16) who promises to fulfil the hopes of Deut 17:14-20. Once he establishes the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem, God promises that his house will reign over Israel for ever (2 Sam 7:11b-16, 2 Sam 23:1-7, Pss 89 and 132; reiterated in 1Kgs 9:4, 5, though with conditions). David is presented as an ideal ruler in a variety of texts, not only possessing God’s

⁴¹ Since J. Wellhausen it has been common to divide 1 Sam 7-12 into an earlier pro-monarchical source (roughly 1 Sam 9:1-10:16; 11:1-11, 15) and a later anti-monarchical one (1 Sam 7:2-8.22; 10:17-27, 12:1-25); see his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (ET Edinburgh: A & C Black, 1885), 245-56. However, the relative dating of these sources is difficult, and there is no reason to assume that an enthusiasm for monarchy gradually gave way after its demise to a general pessimism – more likely there were differing views on the office from the very beginning. For a more nuanced view, see B. Halpern, “Uneasy Compromise.” A related question is whether Deuteronomy and the so-called “Deuteronomistic History” speak with the same voice on the matter of kingship; for discussion, see J. G. McConville, “King and Messiah in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History” in *King and Messiah* (ed. J. Day), 271-95.

⁴² Discussions of precisely which text Josephus used at this point can be found in E. Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), and “Josephus’ Biblical Text for the Books of Samuel” in *Josephus, the Bible* (eds. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata), 81-96. See also C. T. Begg, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary. Vol. 4: Judean Antiquities, Books 5-7* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), and L. H. Feldman, *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible*, 30-36.

⁴³ The views of Cicero, *De Republica* 2.30, were probably typical; emperors, of course, ruled as *princeps* rather than kings.

⁴⁴ On Josephus’ rewriting of Samuel, see L. H. Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrayal of Samuel” in *Abr-Nahrain* 30 (1992) 103-45, and a shorter version in *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible*, 490-508.

blessings in terms of long life, wisdom, strength, and wealth, but also an immortal name (Ps 72:17) and a special relationship to God (see the “royal psalms” 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144.1-11). However, it is his son, Solomon, who rises to the heights of royal splendour. He is advised by his dying father to keep the commands of the Torah (1 Kgs 2:1-4), he builds the Temple, and is granted wealth and wisdom by God (1 Kgs 3-10). Yet even Solomon falls short in the end, brought down by foreign wives and consequent concerns of idolatry (1 Kgs 11). With the exception of Josiah (2 Kgs 23.25), subsequent kings, both of Israel and Judah, fail to live up to the promises given to David and his house, and - four centuries after its inauguration - the monarchy comes to an ignominious end.

All of these kings make their entrance into Josephus’ rewritten biblical history. Each is endowed with the heroic qualities and cardinal virtues which would have appealed to Graeco-Roman readers and furthered our author’s concern to show that Jews had produced marvellous men.⁴⁵ Yet this praise is also tempered with a certain reserve. Saul, for example, who otherwise functions as an exemplary Jewish leader for Josephus, clearly goes astray once he accedes to power (*Ant.* 6.262-8). And the account of David is much shorter than its biblical source; the promise of an eternal covenant with his descendants is quietly dropped (for obvious reasons, given his Roman audience), and the superiority of the Mosaic constitution is shown throughout (*Ant.* 7.367, 384-5, 8.90, 120). Solomon overshadows his father, but is cast primarily as a pious and wise philosopher while Josiah, though a great reformer (and even a prototype of the Pharisees), does not receive the extravagant praise of the biblical account. These narrative retellings, along with a series of clear indications in the text

⁴⁵ See here in particular the studies of L. H. Feldman in *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible*, 509-628.

(*Ant.* 4.186, 214-24, 304; 11.111; 12.138-42; 13.166) make it clear that for Josephus, even when some of the kings exemplified virtuous characters, monarchy was not his preferred state of government.

By the time Josephus wrote, of course, the classical period of Israelite monarchy was but a distant memory. Jews had been governed for four centuries by priests, with remote governors (whether Persian, Ptolemaic or Seleucid) at their head. Even his beloved Hasmonaean ancestors, who ruled for almost a century as priest-kings, fell into disarray once they called themselves kings (*Ant.* 13.300-301, 14.41-42).⁴⁶ It might be true that Josephus does not necessarily blame Antipater and Herod for usurping the kingship from the ineffective Hyrcanus,⁴⁷ but that does not show that he approved of kings generally. During the disturbances under Herod's son Archelaus, Josephus says that Jewish envoys went to Rome, pleading for what he calls 'autonomy' (*autonomia*), self-rule by the aristocratic priesthood under the oversight of a Roman governor (*War* 2.80-92), that is, broadly speaking, a similar constitution to the days of Persian control. Elsewhere he refers to this form of government as a *theokratia*, the sovereign reign of God (*Ag. Ap.* 2.165) with a hereditary high priesthood at its head (*Ag. Ap.* 2.193-194).⁴⁸ Josephus sees this as the best compromise: Roman rule guarded against both tyrannical monarchy and also popular

⁴⁶ Resentment at the non-Davidic, non-Zadokite Hasmonaean usurpation of power was found amongst a number of groups around the turn of the eras. Drawing on *Ant.* 13.288-99 and *War* 1.67-69, E. P. Sanders suggests that the Pharisees were unsettled by John Hyrcanus' combination of high priesthood with kingship, *Judaism*, 380-88; and similar complaints are found in the Qumran scrolls, the *Psalms of Solomon*, and the *Testament of Moses*.

⁴⁷ So D. R. Schwartz, "Josephus on Hyrcanus II" in *Josephus* (eds. F. Parente and J. Sievers), 210-32.

⁴⁸ T. Rajak makes a strong case for constancy within Josephus' political thought; see her article, "The *Against Apion* and the Continuities in Josephus' Political Thought" in *Understanding Josephus* (ed. S. Mason), 222-46. S. Schwartz argues for greater variation within Josephus' outlook, though he would agree that within the *War* Josephus promoted the old Judaeian aristocracy, that is, a theocratic priesthood; *Josephus and Judaeian Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

unrest; most importantly, it safeguarded traditional worship and allowed the priestly aristocracy to rule freely.⁴⁹

Reflections on the Role of Herod in the War

Herod has a dual role in the *War*. The king's fame and unwavering support for Rome secured him a prominent role in Josephus' thesis that Jews were supportive of Roman rule. And this is what we have in Act 1. But Josephus could not leave it there; as a good Hasmonaean he resented the reign of Herod, and as a good priest he firmly believed in a theocratic ideal. In the end he wants to show that *not only Herod but kingship generally was fatally flawed*. And the way he does this is not by saying anything directly (perhaps the presence of prominent Herodians in Rome made an open critique too difficult⁵⁰). Instead, he simply opens a window onto Herod's private life: a seething mass of uncontrolled passion, sons warring for succession, wives at each other's throats, intrigue and gossip. And his readers, I suggest, would have understood. Writing later in the *Antiquities*, Josephus no longer needed to emphasise Judaeans' loyalty to Rome, and his retelling of the Jewish scriptures had furnished him with more than enough examples of great Jewish generals and heroic figures. Herod, in this later work, becomes an example of impiety, an illustration of the *Antiquities'* opening contention that those who follow the Jewish law prosper, while those who disregard the commandments can only fail (*Ant.* 1.14). Freed from the apologetic

⁴⁹ See S. Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (2d ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 73-74; D. Dormeyer, "The Hellenistic Biographical history of King Saul: Josephus, *A.J.* 6.45-378 and 1 Samuel 9:1-31:13" in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (eds. J. Sievers and G. Lembi; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 147-57; Z. Rodgers, "Monarchy vs. Priesthood: Josephus, Justus of Tiberias and Agrippa II" in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne* (eds. Z. Rodgers, M. Daly-Denton and A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 173-85.

⁵⁰ In *Life* 361-66 Josephus claims that he corresponded at some length with Agrippa while writing the *War*.

constraints of the *War*, Josephus is free to tell the story chronologically in all its gory detail.

If my analysis has any merit, it emphasises once again the importance of taking Josephus' material in its literary context and in the light of the Jewish aristocrat's wider apologetic aims. I do not doubt that there is historical material of the utmost importance here, but disassociating it from the author's strongly directional narrative is by no means easy, particularly in the highly rhetorical and stereotypical account of Herod's private life.